

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: The Church - a Work in Progress

(Studies in 1 Corinthians)

#### **The Motivating Power of “Why?”**

(1 Corinthians 6:9-20)

Study #8

#### **Introduction: Because I said so...**

When you have asked someone in authority over you for a reason to do what it is he is telling you to do, have you ever gotten the answer, “*Because I said so!*”?

“*Because I said so!*” can be a sufficient motivator to compel action if it comes from someone with sufficient authority to compel.

We pay taxes, obey speed limits, and do what we’re told to do at work and at school, at least, in part, because an authority told us to.

And, to learn to do a certain, commanded, “*What*” because an authority “*said so*” is to learn an important life lesson.

However, to motivate at the deepest, heart level and to shift “*I’d better do that*” to “*I WANT to do that,*” something more is needed. And that something “more” consists of learning the “*Why?*” behind the “*What.*”

This morning, the Apostle Paul goes beyond “*What*” and uses the motivating power of “*Why?*” to help us embrace biblical sexual purity.

At this point in our study in 1 Corinthians, Paul is urging us to pursue holiness in all aspects of our lives, including in our sexuality.

We have already learned that the city of Corinth was a sexual mess, so it was necessary for him to address these issues.

In many ways, our own city and our own culture is sexually confused and adrift, so it’s important for us to hear this wisdom from Scripture today.

On the way to addressing the sexual sin at issue, though, we come to a transitional paragraph where Paul provides this morning’s first “*Why?*”

#### **No Kingdom Inheritance for Some Believers (6:9-11)**

##### **A [Partial] List of Robbing-of-Inheritance Type Sins (6:9-10)**

*Considering Paul’s list*

***[9] Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,<sup>1</sup> [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor those habitually drunk, nor verbal abusers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.***

That is a list of sins, and it is not unique in Paul’s writings. You can find a similar catalogue of sins in his letters to the Galatians and to the Ephesians.<sup>2</sup>

As I read the verses, you noticed that there is no movement in the list going from serious to more serious, or the other way around.

Nor did Paul list all the self-centered sins, then all of the sexual sins. There is a randomness to the list.

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<sup>1</sup> The focus is on male homosexuality. In the Greek text there are two words, not one. The first is often translated “*effeminate*” and the second refers to male homosexuality, generally. For reasons unclear to me, the NASB translators have represented the two by the one term.

<sup>2</sup> See Galatians 5:19-21. Ephesians 5:5.

And it is clearly a partial list. He could have included lots of other behaviors and attitudes that are sinful and harmful. He didn't, though, and I assume Paul had a reason for listing the sins that he did.

I suspect that he mentioned greedy people and swindlers due to the church's lawsuit problem that we saw last Sunday. (6:1-8)

It makes sense that he listed sexual behaviors that run counter to God's fundamental creation order (seen in Genesis 1-2) - general sexual sin, violating the sanctity of marriage, homosexuality<sup>3</sup> - because of the sinful man of chapter 5 AND because of Corinth's culture.

The other items in the list address addictive behaviors, cruelty, and misplaced worship, all of which pop up in this letter as problems for the Christians in the church in Corinth.

The unifying theme that ties these items together is that practicing them brands someone as "**unrighteous**" and results in them NOT "**inheriting the kingdom of God.**"<sup>4</sup>

That is the point of the list.

*The point of Paul's list*

If the Christians to whom Paul was writing were to live in these sins - taking each other to court, practicing all kinds of sexual sin, getting drunk while observing communion - they won't inherit the kingdom of God, won't have an inheritance, won't receive a reward.

We don't forget that Paul wrote this letter to Christians.<sup>5</sup> They believed in Jesus. So, they had received the gift of eternal life.

A Christian is never in danger of losing that gift. But these Christians were in danger of losing their inheritance in God's kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Bible views all homosexual acts as sinful, just as all heterosexual sex is viewed as sinful outside of marriage.

<sup>4</sup> Paul only mentions "**the kingdom**" fourteen times. But in the three synoptic Gospels, Jesus refers to the Kingdom of God about fifty times (only twice in John), perhaps highlighting that the "**kingdom**" and "**inheritance**" are themes for the believer, for whom Matthew, Mark, and Luke were primarily written.

<sup>5</sup> See 1 Corinthians 1:2, 4; 2:1; 3:1, 9, 16, 23; 4:6, 15; 6:5.

What is at issue here is what we also saw in the image of the Christian whose works will be burned up at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3), while he, himself, "**will be saved, yet only so as through fire.**"

Paul says that in the coming kingdom that Jesus will rule for a thousand years, those who have persisted in blatant disobedience in this life will forfeit the chance to reign with Jesus or to receive an inheritance from Jesus during that reign.

It'll be a sad loss for a believer to not have an inheritance in Jesus' kingdom. There will be deep regret, because that believer won't share in the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom.

But they don't lose eternal life with God. And they will live forever with God in glory.

Regarding those Corinthian Christians, Paul has this to say.

### **Lives Before and After Believing in Jesus (6:11)**

***[11] Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.***

So, before they believed in Jesus, many of the people in the church at Corinth had been involved in the sins Paul has listed.

But then they heard the good news of Jesus. They believed and they were saved, baptized, set apart for God's purposes, and justified.

And changes came. Swindlers stopped swindling. Greedy people leaned into generosity. Those involved in sexual sin ceased. Idolators left the idol's temples.

While Paul was with the Corinthians, teaching them and disciplining them, no doubt there were changes.

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<sup>6</sup> See other references to inheritance and rewards in the letters of Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians and in the letter to the Hebrews.

But by the time Paul sat down to write this letter, some of the changes had changed back.

*Who they have now become...*

Now, some of these Corinthian Christians were, again, caught up in the same sorts of sins they had been active in before. The way they were living was putting them out of commission for the Great Commission.

They weren't letting Jesus impact their lives, so He wasn't able to use them to impact their unbelieving friends. They weren't leading lives that brought glory to God.

Paul argues, "*WHY are you living now as you used to live then when what you are is not what you were then?*"

What was true for them is also true for us. Belief in Jesus has changed who we are, our standing before God, and our eternal destiny.

So, shouldn't it also change the way we live? Of course it should.

*"WHY pursue purity?"* Because it only makes sense to do so, given our new reality AND because that will mean a rich inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Paul now moves from this first "*Why?*" to a second. Call this a thoughtful Christian's approach to purity. We'll take it phrase by phrase.

### **Use Your Body for the Creator's Purpose (6:12)**<sup>7</sup>

#### **Embrace the Truth that "all things" are Lawful (6:12a)**

***[12a] All things are permitted for me...***<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This verse deals with Christian liberty, a very important theme in this letter, as we'll see when we get to chapters 8-10.

<sup>8</sup> Many Bible scholars believe that this was a slogan that had become popular in Corinth and which Paul had himself used while he had been with them.

That first phrase might cause an eyebrow rise.

These six words apply to a whole range of actions that are not explicitly called wrong in Scripture. They are actions, which, in and of themselves, are (potentially) morally neutral. They are permissible.

Of course, Paul believed that there were moral absolutes.

So, we don't take the phrase, "***all things***" absolutely. If a Christian is free to do "***all things***," he still isn't free to sin.

But, within the range of those things that Scripture doesn't explicitly call "*sinful*," the Christian is free to do or not do it.

But that isn't all Paul has to say about the topic.

The Corinthians assumed that having the right to do all [lawful] things meant that it was always perfectly OK to do all [lawful] things.

Paul says, "*Ain't necessarily so.*"

These things which are potentially morally neutral, and therefore which are potentially permissible, may BECOME wrong if we don't take into account a couple of things Paul mentions now.

The first thing is what I'll call *loving expediency*.

Before engaging in any action, we should ask what the likely effects of those actions will be on the people we are called to bless.

#### **Accept That "all things" are NOT Profitable (6:12b)**

***[12b]...not all things are of benefit...***

An action may be lawful for me to take, and at the same time not good for someone I love.

For instance, think of actions you might legitimately take - the purchase of certain items, the consumption of certain foods or beverages, engaging in certain activities - that wouldn't necessarily violate any verse or biblical principle.

Can you imagine a scenario in which taking any of these actions might likely damage someone in your world you are called to bless?

Yes? That is what Paul is talking about.

I am to limit my Christian liberty by the law of *loving expediency*. I have no right to do what in itself is innocent, if by my doing it, you will be harmed.

He follows that up with another principle. Call it *personal mastery*.

### **Determine to NOT be Mastered by Anything (6:12c)**

***[12c]...I will not be mastered by anything.***

So, in addition to asking what effect my proposed action will have on those around me, I am also to ask what engaging in this or that liberty will have on me, personally.

Anything wrong with going to a movie? eating a great meal? exercising? Nope. Free to do all those things? Yep.

Ever seen anybody become so wrapped up in these - or any other activity - that they were no longer exercising a liberty, but were actually enslaved to that which they were free to do? I have.<sup>9</sup>

**Summary:** We can test every action we contemplate by asking, (1). *“Is this beneficial to others?”* and (2) *“Will this enslave / master me?”*

That which is lawful, may, when exercised to the harm of another or when it enslaves the one doing it, becomes awful.

Paul is helping us navigate the course of ethics and morality. He is helping us make moral choices. Notice how he does it.

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<sup>9</sup> Howard Hendricks, one of my favorite profs at Dallas Seminary, used to say that he said “No” to something every day, just to keep in practice, so that he wouldn’t become enslaved to anything - even things he was legitimately free to enjoy.

He begins with a statement about Christian liberty where something is neither absolutely good nor bad.

That’s helpful, because, very often, the world doesn’t break down into clear, “right” or “wrong.” Sometimes, life is fuzzy.

When it is clear, the path forward is clear. We don’t do what the Bible commands to not do; we do what the Bible says we must do.

When it isn’t so clear, we operate on the basis of principle.

The question of whether or not to exercise liberty in a certain case often depends on the situation. Will my action bless others or harm them? Will my action lead to my enslavement or not?

This is the second *“WHY pursue purity?”* Pursue purity because it is the loving and wise way to live.

He’s got us thinking. And with us thinking, he moves to argue that Christians should not use their bodies for immoral purposes because of three other *“Whys?”*

### **The Special Case of Sexual Immorality (6:13-18)**

#### **Our Bodies are Resurrection Bound (6:13-14)**

*Food and the stomach (v. 13a)*

***[13a] Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, however God will do away with both of them.***

The digestive tract, from mouth to stomach and onward, was created by God for food. God created all kinds of food for nourishment AND to be enjoyed.

That’s how the Corinthians saw it, and that’s how we see it, too.

Evidently, though, the Corinthians were taking this proverb (*“Food for the stomach; stomach for food”*) and were applying it where it should not have been applied.

They assumed, *“If I may gratify one bodily appetite any way I wish, why not others? Why not my sexual appetite?”*

Paul says that we can’t take that next step. The two pairs - stomach / any food, the body / any sexual expression - aren’t parallel.

*Sexuality and the body (vv. 13b-14)*

***[13b] But the body<sup>10</sup> is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. [14] Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.***

God did not design the body for sex with any partner the way He designed the belly for all kinds of food.

Belly and eating anything you want to eat go together. Body and having sex with anyone you want to have sex with, don’t go together.

Why not? Because this body we use to make love to our spouse or to engage in sexual activity with someone who is not our spouse, is forever.

God will do away with the belly and food. (v. 13) But the body (in a new and improved, glorified form) is the “house” we will have with us forever.

So, what I do with my body and with someone else’s body here on earth impacts life beyond this world, frankly, in a way that I don’t totally understand.

The Corinthians held to the idea that has been around in our own culture for a long time. It’s the idea that eating and sex are activities limited to this life. Having sex is like taking a drink of water.

Not so, says Paul.

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<sup>10</sup> There is a distinction between “*flesh*” and “*body*” in Paul’s writings. “*Flesh*” is humanity in our weakness, in a fallen state; “*body*” often refers to the whole person, a human as human, meant for God’s purposes.

Unlike eating, sexual intimacy is an act of the whole person with another whole person.<sup>11</sup>

So, *WHY* must we only use the body for the purposes for which God gave us a body? Because the body will not simply pass away but will be raised up just as Christ was raised up.

Another “*WHY?*” follows.

**Misuse of Sex Contradicts Our Union with Christ (6:15-18a)**

*Christians’ bodies are members of Christ (v. 15a)*

***[15a] Do you not know<sup>12</sup> that your bodies are parts of Christ?***

Paul’s use of the word “*body*” here includes everything we are: body, soul, and spirit.<sup>13</sup>

Every part of us - body included - belongs to Christ. Our union with Him is intimate. So, what happens when we engage in sex?

*Sexual intimacy creates a “one flesh” union (v. 16b)*

***[16b] For He says, “THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.”***

Sexual intimacy involves more than a physical act. It joins two persons and provides the most intimate possible “relating” between people.<sup>14</sup>

Evidently, in Corinth, as is often the case today, the thought was that sex was no big deal. Paul quotes the Genesis account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to correct that.

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<sup>11</sup> That is what Paul means by his use of the word “*body*” here.

<sup>12</sup> For the second time, Paul asks the rhetorical question, “*Do you not know?*”

<sup>13</sup> The word “*body*” is used to refer to all of who we are. This is a frequently used figure of speech, *metonymy*.

<sup>14</sup> That is why sex must be reserved for the ultimate commitment of marriage.

The Genesis statement tells us that sexual union establishes a soul-to-soul bond between two people. (NOT that they are married!)

When a husband and a wife enjoy sexual intimacy, they are one flesh - and things get complicated, but in a good way.

And when a Christian has sex with someone outside of the covenant of marriage, things get really complicated, and in a bad way.

*Sexual sin is a sin directly against Christ (vv. 15b-16a, 17-18a)*

***[15b] Shall I then take away the parts of Christ and make them parts of a prostitute? Far from it! [16a] Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her?...[17] But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.***

Note: The example Paul uses here of prostitution tells me that the main Corinthian activity in view here is of Christians continuing to visit the temples where ritual prostitution was practiced. I believe that we may broaden the idea and apply it, generally, to all out-of-bounds sexual activity.

The implications of sexual sin hadn't yet dawned on the Corinthian Christians. So, Paul dawned it on them - and on us.

To become "one," sinfully (with someone to whom we are not married), is to sin against Christ with whom we are "one."

THAT is another "Why?" driving us to pursue purity and to, as Paul says, ***[18a] Flee sexual immorality.***<sup>15</sup>

Fleeing means going in the opposite direction, not seeing how close to the edge we can get without slipping over the side.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The word "***immorality***" (Greek: porneia) is the broadest term for sexual sin in the Greek language, embracing any form of sexual involvement between two people who are not united in heterosexual marriage.

<sup>16</sup> My long-time hero for fleeing immorality is Jacob's son, Joseph. After Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and he wound up in Egypt, he rose to prominence as a steward in the house of an Egyptian official named Potipher. Potipher's wife saw Joseph and tried to seduce him. The Bible tells us that he resisted day after day.

The flight from sexual immorality requires self-control, the powerful presence of the Spirit, and the support of the Body of Christ.

But the damage done by NOT fleeing makes the self-control altogether worth it. And Paul would not have us ignorant about the damage done by sexual sin.

So, here's another "WHY?"

### **Sexual Sin is Fundamentally Different Than Other Sins (6:18)**

*Sexual sin's uniqueness (v. 18b)*

***[18b] Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.***

Paul does not say that sexual sins are the most serious sins, or that they are the worst sins, or that they are unforgivable sins. Only that they do damage in ways that other sins don't.

Among other things, there is the devastating damage done by sexually transmitted diseases and more broken hearts than we could count.

It is simply the case that sex touches us in intimate places in our bodies and in our souls that no other human experience does. And Paul is being loving by pointing us to purity. It's the best way to live.

Today, if you find yourself trapped in a sexual relationship that doesn't align with God's creation order, handcuffed to a habit that you can't break, or fear that you are about to slide over the edge into sexual sin, listen to Scripture and don't go there.

And do not despair.

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One day, while Joseph was working alone inside the house, Potipher's wife grabbed him. Joseph fled, leaving his garment in her hands.

If I have just described you, fresh starts are possible in Jesus. He will walk you back to freedom and sexual wholeness. And we, here at church, will help you. Don't hesitate to reach out for help.

We now listen to the last "WHY?" Paul gives us for the passionate pursuit of purity.

### **Our Mission: Live for the Glory of God (vv. 19-20)**

#### **Each Christian is a Temple, Housing the Spirit of God (6:19a)**

***[19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple<sup>17</sup> of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God...***

Earlier (1 Corinthians 3:16), Paul said that the church is God's temple. Here, he takes that concept one step farther and says that the individual Christian is also a temple of God.

He isn't saying that there is a physical space within us that the Holy Spirit occupies. It is in the realm of the spiritual that He is "**within**" you, and "**within**" me.

As His temple, each of us exist for Him. That means that our sexual purity is critical. Our holiness will point to God's holiness.

And...being God's temple, we belong to God.

#### **Each Christian Has Been Bought With a Price (6:19b-20a)**

***[19b]...and that you are not your own? [20a] For you have been bought for a price...***

Those words speak of redemption. What Paul writes is what would have been written about a slave who was purchased out of the slave market in the first century Greek world.

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<sup>17</sup> The word "temple" (Greek: *naos*) refers to the place where God dwells, not to the general temple precincts. Jesus used this word in John 2:19 when He said, "**Destroy this temple...**" referring to Himself, the dwelling place of God, not to the Herodian Temple in Jerusalem.

Paul refers to our having been redeemed from sin's penalty and power by Jesus' death on the cross. As we result, we are no longer owned by sin. We are owned (everyone is owned by someone) by God.

Since we are temples owned by God, there is only one reasonable way to live:

#### **Each Christian is to Glorify God With Their Body (6:20b)**

***[20b] therefore glorify God in your body.***

The body is the instrument in which we serve God. The body is the means by which we glorify God.

When we seek to live free from God and to be our own master, we become the slave of sin. But when we re-orient to using the bodies God gave us to bring Him glory by our sexual purity, we find freedom.

*"WHY pursue purity and holiness and why stay as far away from sexual sin as possible?"*

Because...

...we long to be inheritors in Jesus' kingdom and so will avoid anything that would disqualify us from that inheritance. (vv. 9-11)

...it is best for us to live in alignment with God's creation order. (v. 12)

...our bodies are bound for glory and therefore deserving of holy care, here and now. (vv. 13-14)

...our union with Christ requires moral purity. (vv. 15-17)

...sexual sin damages us and others in uniquely hard ways, so we will stay as far away from it, both for our own good and for the good of those around us. (v. 18)

...we glorify God (or another way to say it, "*We make God look as good as He really is*"), the One who redeemed us, when we embrace and conform to what the Bible says about our sexuality. (vv. 19-20)